

A Local Farm, Open Space and History Preserved

By Anne Mazar

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Larry and Sandra Pearson sold their 73-acre farm in March. It had been in Larry's family since 1947 and he had lived there his entire life. Moving away was a heart-wrenching decision for Larry. As the story usually unfolds, owners of large properties need money from the sale of their land for retirement. The Pearsons had signed a purchase and sale agreement with a developer who planned on dividing the front of the property into 6-8 lots, demolishing the farmstead, cutting into the impressive 3,400 feet of historic roadside stonewalls for driveways and turning rolling pastures into sterile front lawns. But that is not how this story ended...

The Pearson's had kept their land in agriculture under Chapter 61A, allowing them a reduction in property taxes. Because of 61A, when they decided to take the land out of agriculture and sell, the town had the right of first refusal and 120 days to meet the asking price; in this case a daunting \$800,000. The Mendon Community Preservation Committee took on the challenge, taking exactly 120 days to come up with a plan to preserve the property.

Funding was found through a creative collaboration. Preserving the land was key, but keeping the open fields in agriculture was also important. The full \$800,000 was a stretch for most farmers, but 37 acres for \$395,000 was manageable. The town put the front half, with the farmstead, out to bid. Mark and Michelle Manoogian bought it. Ellen Gould, Mendon Agricultural Commission Chair said, "The Manoogians plan to use the farm to supply consumers with local beef. Beautiful cows will continue to graze on this picturesque spot."

MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife purchased the back wooded half of the property for \$165,000 and it is now open to the public. James McCarthy, MassWildlife Land Agent said, "The success of this multifaceted project relied heavily on the strong partnership formed between MassWildlife and the Town of Mendon, as well as the patience and flexibility shown by the Pearsons... MassWildlife is delighted to have participated in the protection of this culturally and environmentally significant property."

For the rest of the purchase price, Mendon used \$240,000 of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to put a permanent conservation restriction on the Manoogian's land, protecting it as a farm or open space in perpetuity. Metacomet Land Trust will monitor the restriction. Since it was a complex multi-party closing with reams of documents, an additional \$40,000 of CPA funds was needed for legal and closing costs. All parties were thrilled to get what they wanted at a much-reduced cost.

After closing on the property, Larry beamed, “We are DELIGHTED that the situation is such that the farm will not only remain intact, but also will be a fully functioning farm with an enthusiastic young family here.”

In the mid 1800s, the Pearson property’s magnificent stonewalls were constructed to contain sheep in the pastures. The wool helped supply the bustling textile mills along the Blackstone River. The property was also a stop in the Underground Railroad. In the 1940s, the original farmhouse and barn were destroyed by fire. Larry Pearson’s father, Erland, kept dairy cattle and sold his milk to the old Lowell’s Dairy. In 1956, Erland’s cow, Gloria, produced a MA record of 23,950 pounds of milk in one year.

Mark Manoogian enthusiastically says he plans on raising his family and living on the farm for the rest of his life. He works full time in construction and raises the beef cattle on the side, saying that raising the cattle is not super profitable, but he just loves the work.



PHOTO 1: Photo by Anne Mazar. Mark Manoogian (left), new owner of 43 Quissett Road in Mendon, talks with previous owner, Larry Pearson about farming. The farm at will continue in agriculture and/or open space because of funding from Mendon CPA, MA Fisheries and Wildlife and the Manoogians.



PHOTO 2: Photo by Susan Speers. The rolling fields and 3,400 feet of roadside stonewalls will remain at the Pearson Farm, 43 Quissett Road in Mendon.



PHOTO 3: Photo by Susan Speers. Stunning view of the 43 Quissett Road property.